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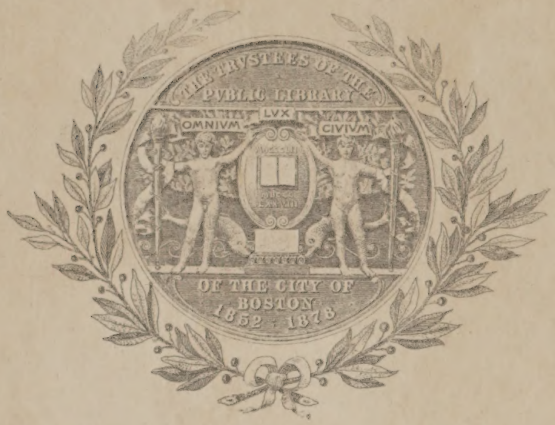
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REV. MR. GILBERT'S SERMON

AT THE

DEDICATION OF THE NEW HOUSE OF WORSHIP

ERECTED BY THE

Second Congregational Society in Newton, Ms.

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THE GENIUS OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

7551.445

Dedication of the New House of Worship

ERECTED BY THE

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY IN NEWTON, MS.,

MARCH 29, 1848.

BY LYMAN GILBERT, A. M.,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

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SERMON.

ACTS xxviii. 22.

BUT WE DESIRE TO HEAR OF THEE, WHAT THOU THINKEST; FOR AS CONCERNING THIS SECT, WE KNOW THAT EVERY WHERE IT IS SPOKEN AGAINST.

THREE days after Paul had arrived a prisoner at Rome, he called together the chief of the Jews, stated to them the manner of his apprehension and delivery into the hands of the Romans—his own appeal to Cæsar, and his consequent presence at Rome for trial. The Jews frankly told him that they had received no letters containing accusation against him, nor had the brethren that came said any harm of him. But learning from some source that he was a preacher of the religion of Jesus, they expressed a wish to hear him. "We desire to hear of thee, what thou thinkest; for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against:"—a very common kind and degree of knowledge, and which, alas, has satisfied too many minds without further inquiry. There has ever been more or less of opposition to the gospel of Christ; but never more virulent than at the time

when explained and enforced by Christ and his Apostles. Subversive of the idolatry of the Roman empire, and opposed to the self-righteousness and false traditions of the Jewish priesthood, and withal testifying of the world that the works thereof are evil, it waked up an antagonism which caused it to be every where spoken against.

Still, however, there was a curiosity in the minds of the chief of the Jews at Rome to give the Apostle a hearing. Paul, prompted by the spirit of his commission, encouraged their request. And when they had appointed him a day, and many came to him at his lodging, he expounded and testified to them the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets. It was in this way that he endeavored to commend the gospel to their understanding, and their hearts,—to disclose to them the true character of this new religion. Then they could better judge, whether it were a system of faith and practice that deserved to be every where spoken against.

My brethren and friends, we have just reached a new period in the history of this Religious Society. We are here in this neat and capacious Temple, which has been erected with a liberality almost incredible to yourselves, now to consecrate it to the service of the only living and true God, — the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It is in this house of God, that we expect in future to enjoy the public privileges of the gospel of Christ. It will therefore

be my object on the present occasion to direct your attention to *The Character and Genius of the Christian Religion.*

Numerous forms of religion have from time immemorial existed in the world. They still exist. They have their peculiarities. And their absurdities and deficiencies are very likely to be suggested to the mind in our survey of the excellencies of Christianity. I shall therefore first take a negative view of the religion of Christ,—after which, I shall consider its positive excellencies.

1. It is not a religion of bloody sacrifices. And this is a fact not without interest on the occasion of the dedication of a new house of worship. At the dedication of the temple at Jerusalem, by Solomon, 22,000 oxen, and 120,000 sheep were offered in sacrifice, in accordance with the rites of the Jewish church. All nations have had their religions; and where the Christian religion has not been known and acknowledged, the altar has flowed with the blood of sacrifice. Under the Jewish economy, bloody sacrifices were enjoined and observed, as typical of that blood which in due time was shed once for all by the Author of our holy religion.

Among other people like sacrifices have been offered; nay, in many cases, conscience has goaded on the sinner to make atonement for his sins, until in his agony for a worthy victim, he has seized and offered his fellow man upon the bloody altar. As in the islands of the Pacific, when a temple was to be reared and dedicated to their false gods, a human

victim, procured and sacrificed for the purpose, was placed under every post of the building. Or, to advert to one more example,—the great Temple of the Sun,—built about four hundred years since, on the plaza or public square in the city of Mexico, and on the very site of the present great cathedral of that city,—was dedicated by the sacrifice of 60,000 human victims. The altar, steps, and terraces of that temple, were all drenched and dripping with human gore on that occasion. But we come to dedicate this house to the services of the religion of the gospel, with no shedding of blood, no cry of distress, no tear of sorrow.

2. It is not a religion of cumbrous forms. Pomps and ceremonies are likely to characterise all spurious and barbarous religions. Pictures and images and parades presented to the senses of unthinking multitudes have led them on in their delusion. While, in accordance with the old heathen notion that all moral evil is confined to the flesh, a corrupt and corrupting priesthood have taught the necessity of penances, as they may be seen in the pilgrimages, the fastings, the self-tortures and sacrifices to which the people are subjected.

The religion of Christ makes no account of such outward trifles. Its great law of divine worship is, 'God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.' To this end the forms are few and simple, and fitted, as all forms should be, to awaken the attention and attach the heart to realities. There is the voice of prayer, that

elevates the soul to her Maker—the voice of praise, rolling on the numbers of sacred music which excites and guides the melody of the heart unto the Lord—and the ministrations of the word, which instead of pictures, images and parades, make known the will of God to man,—while the sacrament of the Lord's Supper shows how the sinner may be forgiven, and the ordinance of baptism teaches us how the soul is purified from sin, and the love of God shed abroad in the heart.

3. It is not a religion which is opposed to the results of scientific inquiry. Many of the systems of religion which have prevailed among different portions of the human family, have put forth such theories of the formation and support of the heavens and the earth, and the things contained in them, that it needs only the diffusion of the lights of science among the devotees of such religions, to show in clear, irrefragable demonstration, that they cannot be true. How else must the Hindoo regard that sacredness which he now gives to the river Ganges, because he has been taught that it comes down out of the heavens, when a true knowledge of geography shall show him that its only source is the springs of the earth, and that the earth has no material connection with the heavens above? Or how must the people of the Celestial Empire regard much in their religion, when by a knowledge of astronomy they shall know that the starry firmament and glowing heavens shine on other lands as well as on theirs?

True, many of the results of scientific inquiry have

excited the hopes of the enemies of Christianity, and they have most confidently predicted, nay, avowedly determined, its overthrow by this means. Nor at times have the friends of the gospel been without alarm from this source, as they have heard the men of science every where speaking against it. But a change is coming over the scientific mind, now that the experiment has been made. One science after another has appeared, comet like, in the firmament of truth, and pursued its erratic and portentous way toward the sun of the gospel, threatening by a percussion to extinguish it forever; but on reaching its perihelion, has been found to have a harmonious orbit of its own, and has wheeled round and taken its station among the lights of the world, leaving the great central luminary to shine on in undiminished glory.

I pass now to the *positive* character of the Christian religion.

1. And first, it is a system which is above the discoveries or demonstrations of human reason. Reason has indeed done much for man in religion. The being of a God, the immortality of the soul, man's accountability to some higher power, are truths or facts, which, although it be disputed by some, it has been thought that man is competent to discover by the powers of reason. Be it so. Be it also, that man needs not to read the long and cumulative arguments which have been ably written on natural theology,—but that reason almost at a single glance, as by intuition, discovers these facts. Still

the sublime and strange mysteries of Christianity, the great truths of the gospel, are not made out by reason. They confound reason; and they compel man, if he will receive the kingdom of God, to receive it as a little child. What are these mysterious facts? Eighteen and a half centuries ago, in fulfilment of the prophecies of God's word, our world's history was marked by a new and extraordinary event. He, who was in the beginning with God, and was God, and by whom all things were created, became flesh and dwelt among men. God-man, the Maker of heaven and earth, appears in the form of a servant, in poverty. The Lord of glory incarnate becomes the victim of man, and with wicked hands is crucified and slain. And not without design in the councils of heaven. For here the holy, the innocent, suffers for the polluted, the guilty. Through the blood of the Son of God the sinner is freely pardoned. And yet man is so lost in sin, by his great progenitor and himself, that he must not only be redeemed by the blood of Christ, but be renewed by the Spirit of God, or he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. Then was evolved to the admiring world the great fact of the divine Trinity. To these sublime truths are added man's entire freedom, and God's eternal purposes. These mysterious doctrines and their kindred truths the gospel proclaims. They *are* the gospel. Say, if ye will, that they are unreasonable; say, if you please, that they confound reason. Ye do but help my argument. Ye do by *implication* admit what I have said, that they are

above and *beyond* the demonstrations of reason. By the gospel the truths of natural religion are assumed. Neither Christ, nor his apostles, endeavor to prove that there is a God, or that the soul is immortal. They reveal to us stranger mysteries. Mysteries which to the Jews were a stumbling block, and to the Greeks, foolishness. But still claiming to be, 'to every one that believeth, the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation.'

2. This religion is fitted to be the universal religion of mankind. Two things would be necessary for this; adaptation, if embraced, to all men, and in all ages. This gospel, strange as it seems to the eye of mere reason, conquered the world. Through the preaching of the early ministers of Christ, it commanded the love and service of many of the house of Israel. It found a dwelling place in polished Athens. It gathered devout worshippers in superb Corinth. It traveled to the great seat of empire, ascended the throne of the Cæsars, and hence swayed the sceptre over the nations. It found confessors among the poor and the rich, the learned and unlearned, the powerful and the feeble. The great doctrines, to which I have adverted as characterising the gospel, make a like impression upon the mind of a Newton and the humblest believer in Jesus. The profoundest intellects have paid their homage to the great mystery of godliness,—"God was manifest in the flesh,"—and the unlettered savage has, with a grateful and believing heart, gloried in the cross of Christ. Neither climate, nor caste, nor

distinction of race, color, or station, presented any insuperable obstacle to its reception. Jew and Gentile, bond and free, barbarian and Scythian, all became one in Christ. And when in after times the church, which professed these truths of the gospel and ought to have guarded them, by its alliance with earthly power and the consequent careless admission of members to her communion, at length used her position against them, and by false philosophy and the traditions of men, well nigh shut their light from mortal eyes, still they were not destroyed. They were not like many other systems of religion, or philosophy, or theories of government, which have had their day and then given place to others to pass away in their turn. They were not meteors that blaze and fill the hemisphere with light for a moment, and then go out and leave all dark as before. But like the great lights of the firmament which still shine on in their glory, notwithstanding the clouds and mists which at times obscure them from our vision—ever breaking through the least opening;—so these lights of the gospel, not extinct, but obscured, still here and there, sent their clear and reviving beams into the hermit's cell, the lowly cottage and the lordly palace. And we trust that many walking in their dimmer light followed in the strait and narrow path that led to heaven. But when at length, in the dawn of the reformation, Luther found that neglected Bible in the library of his monastery, and in the extasy of his joy and gratitude, gave himself to its perusal with that memorable and in-

structive motto before him, "*Bene orasse, bene studuisse*,"—to have prayed well, is to have studied well,—and having learned the truth, proclaimed it abroad from the pulpit and the press, *then* it was, that the great lights of the gospel, after a thousand years of cloud and mist, re-appeared in their glory, to the joy of the church of Christ and the confusion of the lovers of darkness. And I cannot forbear to add, that while Luther studied his Bible at Wittemburg, and Calvin at Geneva, and Zuingle at Zurich, and others in our fatherland, all of different nations and languages, and without conference with each other, each and all came to embrace the same great truths of the gospel to which I have adverted, and proclaimed them to their fellow men. The power of the man of sin was broken, and the era of the reformation rolled in upon the world. And at length, our Bible-reading fathers came to this country, whose landing on the rock of Plymouth has been magnanimously and truthfully declared to be an event which advanced the interests of the human race a thousand years. And for what end did they come? That they might have a habitation where they could enjoy a free and pure gospel for themselves and their children, and leave it such for those who should come after them. And under the preaching and influence of that gospel which they came to establish here, were laid the foundations of those institutions of learning and government and religion, of social and domestic life, which constitute the glory of our land and an example for the world.

And if any one is in doubt as to what they understood to be essential to the gospel and its preaching, there is a certain Catechism which they taught their children, whose careful study will soon resolve his doubts. You may not see much gold on the well known cover of that little book; but you shall find what they valued more precious than gold on the printed page.

And when once they had planted themselves here, there was a new trial for the gospel of Christ. The untutored Indians were here; but our fathers looked upon them as men. And Eliot, that indefatigable minister of Jesus, proclaimed to them on yonder hill the advent of the Redeemer to our world, and the way of salvation through his atoning blood; and many of them embraced the truth and enjoyed its consolations; showing, that for another distinct and wide spread portion of the great family of man, the gospel, as they preached it, was the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation.

Now take up the map of modern missions, and look over the world, and though the harvest is indeed great, and the laborers few, yet you will see that the experiment is now being tried, and has already sufficiently advanced to prove, at least to every believer in the evangelical system of truth, in the redemption of Christ Jesus, that the gospel is fitted and intended for the whole family of man. In the frozen regions of Greenland, on the sunny plains of Africa, far back in the deep forest wilds, in the ports of China, and on the islands of the

sea, has Jesus Christ and him crucified been preached, the acceptable and accepted way of salvation. On that preaching the Spirit of God has descended, and souls have entered the kingdom of heaven and become heirs of eternal life.

As the element of this diffusion over the world, this gospel, by whomsoever received, generates the impulsive principle of benevolence. The real disciple has had such a view of his own sinfulness and lost condition as a sinner, and of the great mercy of God in Christ Jesus, that his heart is filled with unfeigned devotion to his Saviour. He now has hope of immortality through the atoning blood of Jesus, and he now sees, as never before he could see, the danger of those who are without the knowledge of Christ. He ponders and prays over the fearful condition of those who have never heard of the love of Jesus, until he feels that he must make the sacrifice. And he says, 'Father, let me go; Mother, I love you, but let me go, that I may tell the story of Jesus to the dying heathen.' 'My son, the son of my many prayers, your father loves you, your mother loves you; but go; yes, go; may God be with you,—and let us see you in heaven with your crowns of rejoicing.' And when this is known in the church, all hearts respond to the noble work, and rejoice that a new channel is open for their prayers and their alms, in their earnest desires to give to the dying millions the gospel of Christ. And throughout the church on earth, such scenes have been and will be often repeated. Their ef-

fects are already seen in the glorious triumphs of the cross in heathen lands. Thus, like the leaven which a woman hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened, is this noblest of all human enterprises going forward, and will go forward, until, under the agency of the divine Spirit, the great doctrines of the cross shall shine with that effulgence upon the world, that will enable all tribes and nations of men to behold the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ.

And in order to this final triumph, you are not to look for a change in Christianity. It will never prevail over the earth except by retaining its inflexible character. It needs not to change. It has in it all the elements of perfection and adaptation to the end proposed. And it must not be changed, so as to lose its distinctive doctrines, for in them alone can be found the motive for its propagation. That same gospel, which every honest mind must confess was preached by the apostles, that was revived and proclaimed by the reformers, which our fathers came to this land to establish, and which is now held dear by all evangelical denominations, and which shows itself in the prosperity of their churches and the existence and power of their missions, is the only gospel that will or can finally prevail in the earth. But some have thought otherwise, and have divested it of its doctrines, its mysteries, its barbarisms, and made it what they are pleased to call a reasonable religion,—something adapted to the progress of mind, and to the wants of mankind. Well,

then, if they have attained a better religion than that which other denominations have felt bound in love and duty to carry to the heathen world,—if they have improved on the inspiration of God,—why, then, there is the more reason for bestirring themselves and giving this gospel to the dying millions of the human family. Come, then, let us see the effect of this new gospel. Where are the bands of self-denying missionaries, who have bid farewell to friends and home, and are on their way to the heathen? Where is the monthly concert of prayer that they may be preserved and blessed in their labors? Where are the overflowing funds which have been raised for this object by cheerful hands and warm and grateful hearts? Nay, I am too late in these inquiries. These new discoveries in religion were made long before our missionaries went to the Sandwich Islands. We call, then, for the voluminous journal of their missionaries, that we may read and know what triumphs have been achieved over heathenism by a rational Christianity? What! not a page of that journal written? Not a single missionary sent out? Not one appointed? Not a soul willing to go? Not a dollar raised? O, for some Elijah to put up these prophets to their work. But I forbear. It were hard to urge men to carry a gospel to the heathen, which themselves have not deemed worth the trouble.*

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* It is sometimes said in reply, when this test is urged, look at the jesuits. There are missions for you. It is admitted, but it is not a parallel case. The jesuit is bound by his vow to abstain from all in-

And could they be prevailed upon to do it, all that the missionary could effect would be to persuade the reluctant heathen to admit the god of this new religion to the banquet of his own deities. The Moravian missionaries, many years since, learned and taught the Christian world an important lesson on this subject. Though evangelical themselves, they thought they would conduct the benighted Greenlander first to natural and hence to revealed religion; and for a long time they dwelt only on what has been deemed the *rational* in religion. But while they dwelt only in these first elements, they gained not a single soul. They then changed their mode. They took what the gospel has put forth as the first elements, and proclaimed the great mystery of godliness—God was manifest in the flesh. They told the benighted heathen the story of Jesus' love. Then his heart was gained, and the folly of the cross proved wiser than the wisdom of man. A practice which has since obtained in all the missions

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cumbrance of acknowledged wife and child; to have no will of his own, and to obey the mandate of the general in chief, one dash of whose pen may make an island of the sea, a port of China, or the city of Boston, swarm with an army of jesuits. Give me such a society, and I will bring you a specimen of any beast that roams the forest, any bird that flies in the air, any natural portable curiosity of the globe within the reach of man. But there is nothing necessary for all this but the will of a single individual. Nothing of that spontaneous benevolence which the gospel inspires, which characterized the disciples of Jesus, and is akin to the spirit of heaven. We point you to the early Christians, who, prompted alone by the love of Jesus and the souls of men, went every where preaching the gospel. This is the sect to which Paul belonged. This is the sect, whose *missions* are showing, if need be, that the gospel is fitted for the whole family of man.

of evangelical men. And it has now become a settled principle, that "it is the doctrines, the mysteries, and the paradoxes of the gospel, we must carry to the savage, if we would gain his heart to natural religion, from which he is estranged, and to pure morality, of which he knows still less." And Chalmers has left it on record, that after twelve years' labor in preaching on the mere virtues of the gospel and the points of natural religion, he knew not a single reform which had been effected. He changed his course, and proclaimed the great doctrines of grace, and salvation by Christ alone; since which he has been among the first and foremost of those whose praise is in all the churches, and having turned many to righteousness, has gone where he will shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars for ever and ever.

> "'T is when the cross is preached, and only then,
> That from the pulpit a mysterious power
> Goes forth to renovate the moral man.
> The cross imparts vitality divine
> And energy omnipotent to truth.
> In its whole system, ineffectual else,
> Inanimate. He that without wields
> The sacred sword, at least in mock display,
> A useless weapon flourishes in its sheath,
> None feel its edge, none fear it."

3. The gospel affords the only sufficient principle of pure morality. It has been objected to our views of the gospel, that the doctrine of a gratuitous salvation through the merits of Christ, leads to immorality. That man cannot merit salvation by his own good works, is a doctrine which paralyzes effort by taking away the motive.

Let us then look first at the opposite system for producing a pure morality. There is, it is supposed, a tacit covenant between God and man. Man is faithfully to exercise the powers which have been given him, and perform the duties which are enjoined. God is to reward his services with future bliss. He that does good shall live. He that does evil shall die. This were enough to secure the performance of duty. Be it so.

But let us inquire what is the motive in this case? Interest. Interest of a high character, indeed, but yet it is interest. It is working for a reward, involving an element foreign to a pure morality. Virtue consists in self-sacrifice, in that which is benevolent and right, and not in working solely for self. If a man's exertions are to be excited only by the motives of net loss or gain, then what hinders his practising vice instead of virtue, whenever the former shall seem to promise the greater reward? Is there no such thing as virtue, is there no such thing as vice, aside from their consequences? Besides, I am now speaking of religious morality; such as shall be acceptable to God; the first duty of which is, supreme love to him. Love is the fulfilling of the law. But interest—the mere working for a reward—becomes entire selfishness. So that although for this end one should endure long fastings, give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, and these acts were plainly in the way of his duty to God, yet they would not cause his heart to rise in love; for the simple reason that the workings of self-interest can no more result

in disinterested love to God, than the temperature of zero could set the ice on fire.

Some men have been able to perceive the nature of this selfish system, and have taken the ground that we should love God for what he is of himself, and do all our duty uninfluenced by promises or threatenings. This indeed is beautiful, noble, true; but can never be realized by an unrenewed heart. We love God when we subordinate our whole lives to his will, fear nothing so much as to offend him, desire nothing so much as to please him, live entirely to his glory. Now that this is impracticable without the grace of the gospel, let the experience of John Wesley and George Whitefield, who, before they learned the more excellent way, tried it in vain for twelve long years, testify. The mere worldling may tell you that he loves God. He may point you to the Creator's works; he may look out upon some sublime or beautiful scenery of nature, and exclaim, "Oh, how I love God!" But another, with like taste for the beautiful, may fix his eye on the rainbow, and say, "Oh, how I love the sun and the shower! they make such a beautiful bow." And another still may see one of those beautiful cars, fresh from the shop, going by, and exclaim, with just as much piety, "Oh, how I love the maker of that car!"

But let a man take up the law of God, and attempt to practice in all respects the morality there enjoined, and look for salvation by his obedience, and he will soon find that it is not love, but fear, that has inspired his efforts. In other words, in-

terest is the moving spring. He is working for self. And not only so, but the more he toils, the more he finds it impossible to produce love. For, being a sinner, he is obliged to look at God through the medium of an accusing conscience. Now two things are necessary to a pure morality. You must give up self-interest, and you must cherish supreme love to God. In your situation, you can do neither on the simple ground of law. The law has its excellencies. It teaches a pure morality. And for various reasons it is fitting that it should be preached. But even the Old Testament saints did not rely upon it alone to produce holiness, for "they all drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ." In the gospel is found a remedy for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh. The law says, "*do* these things and *live*." The gospel transposes the terms, and says, "*live* and *do* these things." The law of God places the flaming sword at the gate of forfeited paradise, and forbids the return of the transgressor. The law of human morality, if you depend upon it for salvation, sends out an officer to meet and tell the returning prodigal to go into quarantine,—go, put yourself among the hired servants, and if your future conduct shall meet the approbation of your father, he may restore you to his household ; if not, you shall never see his face. But in the gospel, the father runs to meet his son, and with joy and rejoicing welcomes him to all the honor of his house. All that interest could desire, is freely *given* through Christ. Salvation is freely bestowed, divine favor

is pledged, there is no room left for self-interest; and grateful love spontaneously springs up in the heart. The heart is enlarged, and the redeemed sinner runs in the ways of God's commandments. No more a servant, but a son. No more working for a reward, but showing his love to Christ by keeping his commandments. Here is the beginning, and the living spring of a pure morality.

It is sometimes objected to the evangelical system, that its preachers dwell too much on the doctrines, and not enough on the precepts of the gospel. There is a call for more preaching of practical morality. We believe in a morality of the highest order. We would preach a love which, like the sun, shines not to display its own brightness, but to pour light and joy and blessing on creation. We would preach a meekness that, like a bed of linen, though trampled upon a thousand times, should never thrust forth a single thorn to wound the foot of the invader. We would preach a temperance, which is like a deep flowing river, diminished by no drought, made violent by no flood, but is always full, always calm, always safe. We would preach whatsoever things are honest or lovely or of good report, and hold them up as the Christian virtues, without which there can be little evidence of piety. But after all, we have more hope of success in bringing forward the motives and touching the springs of action, than in the efficacy of any lectures upon those actions themselves. I know a physician who has adopted the theory that almost all the diseases "which flesh is heir to," proceed from a debility in the spine,

whence all the nerves of feeling and motion which spread their net-work over the system, take their source. And, consequently, if there is a swelled joint, or a stiffened limb, or a jaundiced eye, or any general or local debility, he makes his application upon the spinal column; and, if the theory be correct, disease is thrown off, the eye is cleared, the digestive powers are brought into play, health enters every limb, and vigor and action is given to the whole frame. I shall not stop to discuss the merits of this theory, nor pledge myself for its truth. I know not what experience and better knowledge might say of it. But I do believe there is a spinal column in theology, which gives it a form erect, which in a healthy state imparts tone and strength to the whole system. Cold chills are thrown off. Feverish and fitful heat is allayed, and a full and health-giving flow of the current of life is secured, which generates a warmth of feeling, a vigor of action, and an energy of soul adequate to every demand. I believe the doctrines of the cross of Christ constitute that column; and that if we would put life and motion into a church, if we would stimulate the Christian to the highest effort in the works of righteousness, we shall begin here, and by dwelling upon the great love of Jesus, the sufferings he endured, the price paid for redemption, animate in the Christian's bosom that affection, which constitutes the grand moving principle of Christian morality and Christian ethics,—*the love of Christ.* The love of Christ constraineth me. Enlarge the heart with this affection, and God's commandments

will be obeyed. This is the well of water that springs up into everlasting life.

After what has been said in proof of my last position, you will not expect me to contrast the morality of the gospel with that of any of the abominations of the heathen world.

4. Another excellence of the gospel is, that it is favorable to individual and national progress. The great simplicity of the Christian faith leaves nations and individuals untrammelled by forms and ceremonies in religion. The gospel, too, stimulates mind, rouses the dormant faculties of the soul, and wakes up man to a sense of accountability. And, doubtless, it is owing chiefly to these facts, that the Christian world is so much in advance of the other portions of the globe, and every year brings out some new developements of knowledge and art. Other religions are childish; they hold man in leading strings, destroy all freedom of choice, and beset him on every side with their directions and rules, prevent his originality, and stereotype the whole race. The same customs, forms, habits of thought and business, continue from age to age. You may go to Herculaneum and Pompeii, and enter their excavated streets and recovered halls, and see the architecture, the furniture and family arrangements of the people who were buried in those cities seventeen centuries ago,—and you may go into any heathen country where their present system of religion has continued so long, and find the same unchanged state of things above

ground;—almost as perfect as if, at that time, there had come over the entire nation a petrefaction, a congelation, a catalepsy, from which they were liberated and restored to life and activity just before you entered their borders for observation. But, enter a Christian land, and all is industry, activity, originality, and rapid advancement in science, in arts, in government, in human good of every kind. And yet the religion of Christ is not outdone. It still calls for higher and higher improvement. Like a river which commences its course in the mountains, where the savage alone drinks of its springs—and passes down through the forest till it comes to the log cabin on the outskirts of civilization—hence onward through the well-cultivated farms and neat villages—and onward still, till it reaches the gorgeous city—at every stage, it is the same river, running deeper and stronger till it rolls out into the broad ocean and visits other climes. So you may give the gospel to the untutored savage, and carry it hence through all the stages of civilization and refinement, and it shall, in every advance, be found more and more adequate to the wants of man, bearing him on into the ocean of unlimited progress. Or you may arrest the oral language of the half-naked heathen, give them the means of instruction, preach to them the gospel, qualify them for a free government, stimulate their minds and bodies to industrious habits, and advance them in all the arts of civilization, till they shall reach the highest point now occupied by any nation

of the globe. And yet the same gospel, which you preached to them at the beginning, will be in no need of being changed. The simple word of God shall be found adequate to teach the wisest of your statesmen, the most learned of your scholars, and the profoundest of your jurists, that wisdom which will conduct them to happiness and salvation.

And now, although there is much said of improvements in Christian doctrine; that the gospel which has been, has become antiquated, and is ready to pass away before the improvements of the age, yet there never has been a time, since the commencement of the Christian era, when the great principles of Christian truth, according to the evangelical system, were better understood and more firmly held, than at the present hour. They have been thoroughly examined. Every objection has been considered. Every proof has been weighed by friend and foe. Every diamond's genuineness has been disputed, and the owners have been obliged to grind them; but, being ground, they have shone with new lustre. If, then, we may appeal to facts, we shall see "that this doctrine is adapted to all, every where, and in all times. It never grows old. Those who embrace it, never find themselves behind their age; they understand it; they are understood by it; they advance with it, and aid its progress. The religion of the cross appears no where disproportionate to civilization." The gospel is a stationary power, ever drawing up the community to a higher elevation.

5. The gospel of Christ meets the highest wants of man. Man was made for a religious destiny. A creature of moral powers, and a subject to the divine government. By the fall, sin entered our world. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. He must die. His soul must enter the eternal world. Reason apprehends a future retribution. Conscience forebodes a judgment. The word of God reveals future rewards and punishments. Now what of all human wants is the greatest? The pardon of sins and the renovation of the heart,—that man may escape the penalty of his transgressions, and so be admitted to the divine presence,—that he may be regenerated in spirit, and so be prepared to enjoy that presence. The gospel professes to do these two things for man, and thus opens to his immortal spirit the glorious hope of eternal bliss. Oh what a message of love and salvation to a dying world! Already has this hope sustained an innumerable multitude of souls through all the trials of this life; and from Moses down to the present hour, they have esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. It has given peace to the troubled conscience,—it has, by imparting a spirit of obedience, made the yoke easy and the burden light;—it has subdued passion, armed the soul against temptation, consoled the afflicted, encouraged the timid, invigorated the feeble, supported the dying, and winged the departing spirit for the heights of eternal bliss. Heaven's population is increased by its victories, and the

voice of the great multitude of the redeemed, is like the sound of many waters surging around the throne of God and the Lamb. This glorious hope is ours.

And now, in drawing these remarks to a close, if the question be asked, Why have ye reared this neat, this tasteful, this expensive temple in this modern style? why have ye adorned it with so much beauty and furnished it with so much convenience, to be devoted to the ministrations of an old religion, that many have thought and said is ready to vanish away? why not let the old house and the old religion wear out together? Ye have our answer in what has been said. We believe that the religion of Christ will be ever young, and ever new.

We have no great confidence in any new discoveries in religious truth. We know that the Bible, both as to its inspiration and its contents, has been studied more than some men are aware of. And we have confidence that those great doctrines of the gospel which were preached by the apostles and the fathers of the church, which reappeared on the study of the Bible by the reformers, which our Bible reading fathers came to this land to preach and enjoy, and which are now held dear by all evangelical Christians, — and which by means of the missionary of the cross are now spreading light and love through the benighted nations of the globe, *is the religion* which God has revealed to man. And having this evidence, we dare not change. For an

apostle has said, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." And with this evidence, and the Bible in our hands, we would not change, for we believe "it is the power of God, and the wisdom of God, unto salvation, to every one that believeth." We do not deny that there may be some unimportant points of revelation, which by a more careful examination and more perfect analysis may be better understood; but as to the great truths of revelation, the great lights of the moral world, we consider that they have been long ago discovered. A more perfect and extended science, and a more powerful telescope, may enable the astronomer to bring under observation some unknown planet, that has hitherto moved in its distant orbit, unseen by mortal eye; or resolve into a cluster of stars some little nebula, some little spot of misty light far off in the heavens,—but what telescope or astronomer can give us another Sun?

This is the gospel which your former pastor, for fifty years, preached to this church and people, and when the day of trial came, as respect for the dead and fidelity to the living compel me to say, he was the Leonidas who, in this region, stood in the Thermopylæ of the church and gave the first shock to the hosts of error. Under God, it was that noble stand of his, which saved the two churches and societies of this town. It was a stand which cost him deep anxiety and earnest prayer; which broke in upon friendships long established, and

caused a painful conflict of feelings in his own bosom. But believing, as he said, that the gospel has a distinctive character, and that its sacred truths had been long since ascertained—that conscientious integrity for which he was distinguished, and that fidelity to Christ which he could not renounce, compelled him to take the noble stand. For this, he endured much reproach; but, when he came to die, he looked back upon that event of his life with much satisfaction. Referring to the feeling it cost him, and the reproach he had endured for it, he said to me, but a few days before his departure to the eternal world, and in the near view of death, "I believe I did right." And *we* believe he did right. And "THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED."*

It is this gospel which your present pastor has endeavored to preach here for twenty years. And I now congratulate the members of this church and society on the completion of this spacious and commodious Temple, which we are about to consecrate to the public ministrations of this gospel of Christ. I rejoice in this new token of your interest in the services of God's house, and your faith in the importance and the value of the Christian's hope. I congratulate you on the liberality which has in so large a measure provided for the expense of this structure. I congratulate you on the choice of your architect, whose devise has made it the ornament of

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* Rev. WILLIAM GREENOUGH, the first pastor of this church, was ordained, November 8, 1781, deceased, November 10, 1831. The present pastor was ordained colleague, July 2, 1828.

your village, the admiration of all passers-by, and given it beauty and convenience within. I congratulate you on the promptness and fidelity of your contractors, who have carried out the plan of the architect in so admirable and satisfactory a manner. I congratulate you on the construction of yonder beautiful organ, whose presence on this occasion, and whose anticipated usefulness in leading the praises of the sanctuary is a matter of joy. Yes, and as among the cheerful contributors to the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness, were those who wrought in fine twined linen and ornament of needlework, so on this occasion I congratulate you in the results of aid from this source, as seen in these aisles and in these pews. I congratulate you on the fidelity and self-sacrifice of your building committee, whose untiring assiduity has so successfully and so nearly brought this enterprise to its consummation. Ah! that one word, building committee, has sent a note of affecting import through many a heart, and bids us pause and drop the mournful tear over the memory of the dead. One of that number, who was among the first and foremost in this enterprise, who had looked forward to this day with deep interest, and whose rich and varied tones we hoped to hear chiming with the organ's swell, on the present occasion, has gone to worship in the upper sanctuary.* But we are yet on earth, and it would not be his wish to stay our

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* Moses P. Greenleaf, M. D.

congratulation. Again, I congratulate you on the interest which is felt in your prosperity, as you witness it in the presence of this crowded assembly. Once more, I congratulate you on the prospects that are before you. We are now about to consecrate to the service of God such a house as we had hardly dared to hope we should ever see in this place,—erected with a remarkable degree of harmony, and with a liberality which, if it has not already, I trust will yet pervade every member of this society. It is indeed an occasion of joyful anticipation.

May this pulpit ever proclaim the doctrine of the cross and the unsearchable riches of grace in Jesus Christ. May this orchestra ever resound with praises to Him who sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb. May these seats be filled with devout worshippers. May all the graces of the Christian life here find encouragement and growth. May this house be to you and your children none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. And may we here so worship God, that when we shall have done with the sanctuary on earth, we may be admitted to that world in which the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof.

ARISE, O LORD, AND ENTER INTO THY REST, THOU, AND THE ARK OF THY STRENGTH.